

COUNTY NEWS



PUBLISHED FOR EMPLOYEES OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

February 2001

County Workers Unite to Aid Viejas Fire Response

ensuring the safety of people in the affected area. Deputies from the Alpine station were among the first called to evacuate people from homes in the fire's path, and were later joined by personnel from all over the County. About 160 deputies and reserves not only helped with evacuations, but alerted residents who could potentially be affected and assisted in keeping County roads open for firefighters.

Department of Public Works crews from throughout the region also played a key role in the emergency response. John Dorval was just one of the many workers brought in to help with road closures and traffic control. He stood for hours at the intersection of Honey Springs Road and Skyline Truck Trail, talking with fearful residents on their way back to their homes to rescue belongings and others fleeing flames with whatever they could carry.

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On Wednesday, Jan. 3, San Diegans woke up to the eerie sight of enormous dark clouds of smoke trailing across many parts of the county. East County was on fire.

Local agencies pulled together to provide the emergency response and tactical support to what would become the Viejas Fire. And although County staffers may not have been physically fighting the fire, an enormous amount of personnel went into assisting the effort.

Rescuing Creatures

At 4:30 a.m. one of the first County workers on scene was Animal Control Officer Robin Sellers. It was the Animal Control officers' job to coordinate the rescue of animals in the firestorm's path. As Officer Sellers drove through one section of Interstate 8 to start the rescue effort, she was confronted by a wall of flames. She managed to reverse her

direction, but nearly collided with a vehicle driving on the wrong side of the road due to poor visibility from the heavy black smoke.

It was an exhausting job, but altogether Animal Control officers rescued approximately 400 animals. That included helping one local who had 75 cats, three dogs, a rabbit and two doves! It also included moving a wild burro, who stubbornly refused to climb inside a rescue trailer.

Once animals were rescued, animal care staff took over. They prepared caging and corrals, and set up food, water and bedding for all the different types of animals. The staff continued to provide for the animals until they could be reunited with their owners or caretakers.



The County's El Monte and Flinn Springs parks become staging areas for fire crews.

Ensuring Safety

Throughout the day, Sheriff's deputies and reserves played an important role in



New Year, New Roles

Supervisor Dianne Jacob officially passed the gavel and the board chairmanship to Supervisor Bill Horn in a Jan. 9 ceremony. Supervisor Ron Roberts was elected vice chairman and Supervisor Greg Cox was elected chair pro tem. Supervisors Cox, Jacob and Pam Slater were also sworn in for their new terms.

NewsBriefs

Replay Days

Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Horn gave his State of the County address on Thursday, Feb. 8, from the California Center for the Arts in Escondido. If you couldn't travel up the I-15 to be there in person, you can still catch a look at the Chairman's plans for the upcoming year. Tune into CTN throughout February for rebroadcasts; for detailed schedule information, go to www.ctn.org.

Designing for Dinero

Pull out your crayons and get creative for cash! The County's looking for a new design for the T-shirt worn by staffers during WalkAmerica, which benefits the March of Dimes. CAO Walt Ekard is sponsoring the contest, which awards \$100 to the entry picked. The deadline is March 2. See the February paycheck stuffer for design guidelines or contact Patti King at (619) 515-6525 or via e-mail at PKINGXHE.

Blood Drive Days Ahead

The County's annual blood drive is just around the corner. Make sure you sign up to give blood in March and help save a life. Look for more information in the next *County News*, or check out the blood drive posters in a work area near you. You can also contact Marisa O'Neil at (619) 409-3275.

Calling All CECO Campaigns!

Many departments have finished their annual CECO/United Way campaign, but many more are still in progress.

If you haven't completed your campaign, help is available from the County's United Way rep Donald Epps. Just call him at (858) 636-4163. Completed campaign forms should be sent via County mail to Vickie Velasco, Aging & Independence Services at W-433.

It's not too late to donate! Whether you're a first time donor or you want to increase your contribution through automatic payroll deductions, contact Velasco at (858) 495-5998.

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In *Walt's* Words...

A New Leader for Health & Human Services

Many people were saddened last year when Dr. Robert Ross announced he was leaving his job as director of the County of San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency. We knew it would be hard to replace a man with his energy, vision and ability to work with many different groups in our diverse community. Today, I'm happy to introduce to all of you a successor to Dr. Ross, who is tremendously qualified to lead the agency through the challenges that lie ahead.

On Feb. 12, Dr. Rodger G. Lum will take over the director's post, and I can't tell you how excited and pleased I am to have him. Dr. Lum comes to us from Oakland, where he has headed Alameda County's Social Services Agency for the past nine years.

Dr. Lum was chosen after a national search, and he stood out because of his wide-ranging experience in the health, social services and mental health fields, his reputation as a consensus builder and his organizational abilities. He'll need all these skills and more as the top administrator of an agency with a \$1.2 billion annual budget, and nearly 6,000 employees. His charge is to fully integrate the agency, so there truly is "no wrong door" for the people we serve, whether they need financial assistance, health care, training to move from welfare to work or one of the many other services the agency offers.

Because funding for health care is often dependent on decisions made in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. and the fluctuations of the economy, I wanted someone in this position who is used to making difficult budget decisions. I believe Dr. Lum is well-qualified to guide the agency through both plentiful and lean economic times.

Another priority for Dr. Lum is career development and advancement of agency employees, a goal I share with him. He is committed to helping employees reach their potential in any way he can, and making sure they have the tools

to do their jobs.

Let me tell you about Dr. Lum's impressive resume. He has served as assistant director of Alameda County's Health Care Services Agency, and executive director of Oakland's Asian Community Mental Health Services. He has also taught at the California School of Professional Psychology, UC Berkely and San Francisco State University. He holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from U.C. Berkely.

During his tenure as assistant director of the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, Dr. Lum oversaw a project in which the health care needs of low-income residents were assessed and prioritized to determine how scarce funding would be allocated. The project helped demonstrate the need for more funding for health care services in the community. And as Executive Director of Asian Community Mental Health Services, he expanded services and funding to cover substance abuse services, job training and services for the developmentally disabled, targeted at the Asian immigrant and Southeast Asian refugee communities.

Dr. Lum rises to the top in person as well as on paper. We asked our eight finalists for the director's job to meet with two separate interview panels, made up of health and social services experts and advocates, along with county executives. Amazingly, Dr. Lum was the top choice of every member of both panels! The panelists were asked to individually rank the candidates after their interviews, and all of them put Dr. Lum at the top of their list.

For these reasons, I am confident we have the right person for this big job. I hope you welcome him, as I do, as a new member of our county family.

Walt

Walt Ekard
Chief Administrative Officer

NewsBriefs

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Spay Day Pays

In celebration of Spay Day USA, on Feb. 27 Animal Control is giving out 100 Spay-Neuter Rebates at each shelter on a first-come, first-served basis. These rebates take \$20 off the cost of a spay or neuter surgery. Spay Day USA highlights the importance of altering pets for both their long-term health and the benefit of the community.

The rebates are one tool the department is using to reach the goal of the Pet Project 2000; by lowering the number of animals born without homes each year, shelters will be able to end the euthanasia of adoptable and treatable animals in San Diego County.

Partnership Pays Off

The Lemon Grove Sheriff's Station Traffic Division received national recognition for its work with the City of Lemon Grove on a program to improve pedestrian safety. The project was chosen for "The National 2000 Pedestrian Project Award," which was presented by the Institute of Transportation Engineers and the Partnership For A Walkable America.

Thrills and Spills

County employees can enjoy discounted tickets to a special Harlem Globetrotters performance and two upcoming San Di-

ego Gulls games. The Globetrotters take to the hardwood on Feb. 23; the puck hits the ice on both Feb. 24 and March 16. For more information, look for the DIBBS fliers or call (619) 235-7879 or 7881.

Law and Orders

Sheriff Bill Kolender, Probation Chief Alan Crogan and other law enforcement leaders swap their badges for aprons on Thursday, Feb. 15 at the STAR/PAL Celebrity Luncheon. The "big guns" serve time as celebrity waiters to raise money for youth programs and to heighten awareness about the activities offered by the or-

ganization to kids throughout the county. The lunch starts at 11:30 a.m. at the Balboa Park Club, 2150 W. Pan American Road. For more information contact the STAR/PAL office at (619) 531-2718.

Certified Savings

Skittish about the stock market? The San Diego County Credit Union can help you get set up with a certificate of deposit for safe and secure investing. Special rates are available for an eight-month certificate. For more information visit your local branch, go online to www.sdccu.com, or call toll-free (877) SDCCU-4U.

Ver•ba•tim

Letters from satisfied customers served by County employees.

Ben Trovaten (Treasurer/Tax Collector) helped a taxpayer investigate a property tax problem and received these words of praise:

"This man is so kind, so efficient, and so courteous that dealing with him makes a citizen very happy to know that people like Ben work for and represent me in government."

Kenneth Kaminski (Public Defender) won praise from a judge for his work on behalf of his clients.

"I can state without equivocation that Mr. Kaminski's legal knowledge, advocacy skills, personality, sense of humor and the obvious caring he exhibits toward his clients is exceptional."

Tess Gutierrez (HHSA, Eligibility Technician) was singled out among a "very courteous" staff as noted by a client.

"She encouraged me to ask questions when I didn't understand and she explained all the confusing requirements that she needed. I appreciate the way she shows her caring attitude toward her client."

Jack Walsh (HHSA, Public Health) was commended for his commitment to a patient with tuberculosis.

"Mr. Walsh always answered all my questions thoroughly, fulfilled every request, and returned all of my telephone messages - all of this in a timely manner."

Jacquie McDade (Animal Control) received words of gratitude for helping a customer through the adoption process.

"We wish to thank Jacquie for her kindness and helpfulness during the adoption procedure. She truly showed us the way."

Pat Watters (HHSA, CALWorks) was sent a letter of appreciation for making a difference in the life of a drug addict.

"God only knows what would have happened to me if I had been assigned to someone else. I remember the first time we met, you were so caring, compassionate and understanding."

Brian Gilmore and **Kelly Gaffrey** (Planning & Land Use) were commended for working late and saving a North County couple a 100-mile round trip the next day.

"They continued to process our forms in a courteous and efficient manner and issued our building permit."

Animal Control was recognized by a long-time supporter who appreciates the service she's received over the years.

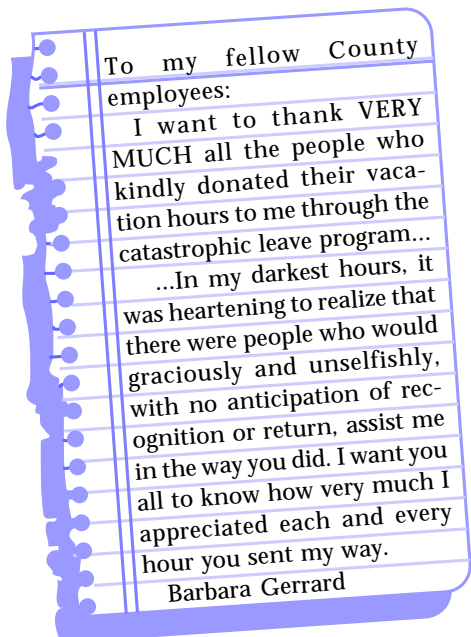
"More recognition should be given to these facilities because of the professional manner in which you serve the communities."

Alice McLennan (HHSA, Eligibility Technician) was thanked by a client who no longer needed her service.

"You have been so helpful to me and to my children during an extremely difficult time in my life. Thank you for getting us through in good health and for being there when our health was not so good."

Ivan Holler (Planning & Land Use) was commended by the Building Industry Association for his professionalism in the guidance of the Building Division.

"You have consistently demonstrated your commitment to improve the condition of the department."



County Unites *(continued from page 1)*

Caring for Evacuees

Gina Wilkey, R.N., spent the night at a Red Cross shelter providing emotional support and basic medical assessments to people affected by the fire. Numerous other Health and Human Services personnel helped the Red Cross coordinate and provide emotional support to the hundreds evacuated.



Bob Eisele used his fire behavior skills to help predict the fire's path.

Predicting Progress

The fire happened on his own turf, but Agriculture, Weights and Measure's Bob Eisele was drawn into his role as fire behavior analyst for the Viejas Fire simply because it was his turn to be on call.

It just so happens this County employee is on a federal incident response team that pitches in on major fires in Southern California.

It was Eisele's job to predict the fire's behavior. He was brought in about 9 a.m. on Wednesday and immediately set out to collect information. He gathered information on weather patterns, the area's fire history, topography, and what type of fuel (e.g., vegetation) the area had to burn.

The son of a fireman, Eisele held a healthy respect for fire. To help him with his role as watershed manager for the County, Eisele enrolled in fire management classes a few years ago and excelled. That led to an invitation to be part of a Southern California incident response team, a position he has held for three years.

Behind the Scenes

Working behind the scenes was the Office of Disaster Preparedness. Staff opened the County's Emergency Operations Center to provide coordination support to the response. They also tracked the fire, and kept public officials and the general public informed of the progress of firefighters battling the blaze.

Fleeing the Flames

When Health and Human Services employee Char Heckerroth went outside her Alpine home around 5:30 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 3, she immediately realized the intense smell of smoke wasn't just a neighbor burning wood. Then she saw the dark cloud about five miles away and knew the situation was serious. By mid-day, it was time to evacuate. She loaded up her two sons, the horses and other pets, and some prized possessions and left to take refuge at a friend's house.



Char Heckerroth's evacuation of her Alpine home was captured in print and on TV.

By that time, Heckerroth's yard had been turned into a make-shift base for California Department of Forestry firefighters, complete with fire engines, bulldozers and other vehicles. She and her husband had been providing coffee and food to resting firefighters. When it came time to evacuate, her husband stayed behind to continue supporting the fire crews and keep watch over their house.

(If the name Heckerroth sounds familiar—it is. Just two months ago *County News* featured Char's brother-in-law Fred, who helped CDF crews during another brush fire. Fred came to the aid of his brother's family during this fire as well.)



The Heckerroths had a front row view of the fire from their yard.

County News is published for the 17,000 employees of the County of San Diego.

Board of Supervisors

Greg Cox, District 1
Dianne Jacob, District 2
Pam Slater, District 3
Ron Roberts, District 4
Bill Horn, District 5

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This information is available upon request in alternative formats for persons with disabilities.



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NewsMakers NewsMakers

Dr. Rodger G. Lum was appointed director of the Health and Human Services Agency. Lum was director of the Alameda County Social Services Agency in Northern California, a position he held since 1992. (See CAO Walt Ekard's

column on p. 2 for more information on Dr. Lum.)

Park Ranger Faith Berry was selected for inclusion in the 2001 edition of the International Who's Who of Public Service, sponsored by the Who's Who Historical Society.